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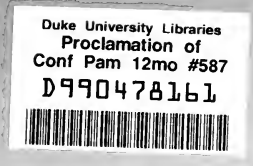
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No. 68.

PROCLAMATION OF PEACE.

BY REV. J. L. DAGG, D. D.

In less than two years, war has inflicted on our country, before prosperous and happy, evils so many, and so great, that the heart sickens in contemplating them. Millions of property have been consumed, and millions of debt have been accumulated, to oppress unborn generations. Extensive regions of our territory have been ravaged and desolated, and the inhabitants have been driven into exile, or subjected to tyranny and insult. Many thousands of our citizens have perished in battle, or by disease originating from the hardships of military service; and other thousands have been so maimed and enfeebled, as to be unfitted for the duties and enjoyments of life. The land is filled with widows and orphans; and mourning, lamentation and woe, have spread through all its extent. Oh! for a return of peace! When will the calamity be past? If some envoy from European power would lift up his voice, and in the name of humanity protest against the wrongs which we suffer, what relief would it afford! And if our enemy, whether yielding to necessity, or a sense of justice, should authorize a proclamation of peace to go through the land, how would our hearts leap for joy!

But gloom, anxiety, and terror still prevail. Where shall we look for help? Ye men of piety, who, like Israel of old, have power with God, why do you not besiege the throne of grace, and give the Almighty no rest until he interposes in

our behalf? Ye tell us that he is merciful, and hears prayer, and that he governs the universe, having all hearts in his hand. If ten righteous men could have saved Sodom, why do not ye save our land? Why has not some angel been sent to drive back our invading foe, and to fly through the midst of heaven with a proclamation of peace? Have ye ceased to pray, or has God forgotten to be gracious?

Alas! No relief appears from this quarter. Although men of piety have prayed, and incessant, fervent, importunate petitions have gone forth from thousands of hearts, yet the awful Sovereign still holds in his hands the two divisions of our once happy union, and dashes them against each other like two vessels of the potter, breaking them into shivers. Is God our enemy? Does he muster the hosts for the battle? And is he unwilling to be at peace with us? Shall we charge him with cruelty, or entertain a momentary doubt that the judge of all the earth will do right?

God reigns, and justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, though clouds and darkness are round about him. Our feeble minds fail to penetrate his designs, and comprehend his ways. But one thing is clear, that when his judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world should learn righteousness. We are assured that if a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him: and the present awful outpouring of divine judgments, ought to bring our iniquities before our face, and prostrate us before God in deep humility and sincere penitence. If it has this effect, the very evils which we suffer may become our richest blessings.

But who is he that dares charge God with cruelty, or complain because he does not put an end to our troubles? It cannot be justly alledged that he delights to torture men with the miseries of war. He is pleased to be called "the God of peace;" and he sent his Son, "the Prince of Peace," into our world on an errand of peace and mercy; and at his entrance, a multitude of the heavenly host, in a song of joy proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." When this messenger of peace was about to

leave the world, he said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you:" and then gave himself a sacrifice, that he might effect our reconciliation with God. Having risen from the dead, he ascended his throne on high, and sent his proclamation, "the gospel of peace," through the world. His heralds have spread the joyful news, and it is our privilege to welcome them with the exclamation, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that PUBLISHETH PEACE; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth." Through all the clangor of arms and uproar of battle, this proclamation of peace sounds in our ears. Why, then is it that the war still rages, and that men still imbrue their hands in each other's blood?

Heaven, where God has fixed his throne, is a realm of peace and love; and the great Sovereign has formed the gracious design of extending his peaceful reign over this wretched world which we inhabit; but men oppose this gracious design. In heaven God is the centre of all attraction and the source from which all derive bliss; but on earth men make themselves their own centre, and selfishly gather to themselves all the enjoyments which they can grasp. In this selfishness the wars originate in which men oppose and destroy one another. Were men's hearts right towards God, wars would cease, and the peace and bliss of heaven would come down to dwell on earth; and God would reign unopposed below, as he does in his high and holy place. Because men oppose God's gracious design to extend the empire of peace and love, he permits their evil passions to manifest their malignity, in bloody wars and cruel oppressions. That men are at war with one another is terrible; but that they are at war with God is more terrible. Because they fight against him, he leaves them to fight against one another, that they may see the evil of their ways, and turn away from their wickedness. Let us, then, even amidst the roar of cannon and tumult of battle, listen to God's proclamation of peace; and if men will not put an end to the cruel war which they wage against us, let us take hold of God's covenant, and be at peace with him. His peace the

world cannot give, cannot take away, cannot prevent, cannot disturb. We need not wait for it until the war is over, and its calamities past. We may find it on the wearisome march, or in the very presence of the ruthless foe; and we may enjoy it in the camp and in the field, in perils and in suffering, in triumph or in defeat. Far better would it be to be crushed beneath the heel of our enemies, with the peace of God in our hearts, than to triumph over them, and be at war with God.

Such is the delightful effect of the gospel, that it enables men to rejoice even in tribulation. Every one can conceive what joy would thrill the hearts of all who dwell throughout the land, if peace were proclaimed, and the assurance given that we have nothing more to fear from the foes that assail us on earth. But far greater joy ought we to derive from the gospel proclamation which gives assurance of peace with heaven. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance."

All ye who read this little tract, listen to the news with exulting joy. Lay down your arms; cease your war against God; accept the grace which he freely bestows, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Jesus, lover of my soul!
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the billows near me roll,
While the tempest still is nigh;
Hide me, O my Saviour hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last!

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